A meeting of the Board of Veterans Services (BVS) was held on Monday, September 10, 2007 at the Quantico Marine Base.

#### **Members Present**

Vince Burgess; Mark Cole; Paris Davis; Paul Galanti; Pat Green; Thad Jones; Bill Leighty; Bettye Simmons; Max Taylor; Vivian Watts; and Sam Wilder.

#### **Members Absent**

John Anderson; Kirk Cox; John Edwards; Samuel Metters; Jay O'Brien; Al Sample; Judson Stanley; and Chairman of the Veterans Services Foundation Board of Trustees.

## **Commonwealth of Virginia Officials Present**

Anne Atkins, Communications Director, Department of Veterans Services; Bert Boyd, Chief Operating Officer, Department of Veterans Services; Steve Combs, Director of Policy and Planning, Department of Veterans Services; Rhonda Earman, Special Assistant to the Commissioner, Department of Veterans Services; Don Ferguson, Assistant Attorney General, Office of the Attorney General; David Harker, Outreach Director, Department of Veterans Services; Martha Mead, EO 19 Project Director, Department of Veterans Services; Armistead Ransone, Finance and Administration Director, Department of Veterans Services; Judith Reid, IT Program Assistant, Department of Veterans Services; David Simmons, Information Technology Manager, Department of Veterans Services; and Dawn Smith, Assistant Secretary of Public Safety.

#### **Others Present**

Tony Haddock of McKinney, Texas.

# **Materials Distributed**

Meeting agenda; draft minutes of the March 19, 2007 and July 16, 2007 meeting; Summary of August 21, 2007 Secretary of Public Safety Board Protocol meeting; Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations' 2008 Legislative Objectives and Position Papers; Care Centers Subcommittee Report; Budget and Strategic Planning ad hoc Subcommittee Initial Action Plan; July 16 BVS Board Retreat Summary Report; September 7, 2007 e-mail message from Cemeteries Director Dan Kemano to Pat Green, outlining activities and projects at Virginia veterans cemeteries; invitation to the upcoming Sitter & Barfoot Veterans Care Center dedication ceremony; and information on the upcoming Virginia is for Heroes Conference.

#### Call to Order

With of 11 of 19 members present, Chairman Galanti called the meeting to order at approximately 11:35 a.m. The membership and guests recited the pledge of allegiance to the American flag.

#### **Approval of Minutes**

A **motion** was made by Delegate Cole, seconded by Bettye Simmons, and passed unanimously to approve the minutes of the March 19, 2007 and July 16, 2007 meetings, as drafted.

## **Department of Veterans Services Initiatives**

Commissioner Burgess began his report by reminding everyone of the Sitter & Barfoot Veterans Care Center (SBVCC) dedication ceremony to be held at the SBVCC on September 26 beginning at 1:00 pm. Commissioner Burgess noted that Governor Kaine and other elected officials would be in attendance, and that tours of the SBVCC would be included in the festivities. Commissioner Burgess thanked Board members and DVS staff who have worked hard to put the ceremony together, and urged everyone to attend. Commissioner Burgess also noted that several donations have been received from Board members, Veterans Service Organizations and others to pay for the expenses associated with the event.

Commissioner Burgess then reported on another event co-sponsored by DVS and the Mid-Atlantic Addition Technology Transfer Center. Commissioner Burgess noted that the Virginia is for Heroes Conference will be held on October 17 from 8 am to 4:30 pm at Lewis-Ginter Botanical Gardens and will target health service providers, educators, employers, members of the faith-based community, state and federal government representatives, the media, policy makers, veteran service organizations and non-profit organizations. Commissioner Burgess emphasized that, together, these participants will create a roadmap that mobilizes resources in Virginia communities and at all levels of government to ensure a bright future for these veterans and their families. Commissioner Burgess advised that Governor Kaine and other elected officials will participate in the conference.

Commissioner Burgess then reported on the following Executive Order 19 (EO 19) initiatives:

<u>Disabled Veterans Education and Training Program (DVET)</u>. Commissioner Burgess explained that the DVET program is being administered by TecAccess, a technology firm DVS has partnered with. The program is funded from a \$340,000 allocation from the Governor's Office for Workforce Development, and provides training and job placement in the technology field for disabled veterans. Commissioner Burgess noted that spouses of veterans who are severely disabled also may participate in the program. Commissioner Burgess also noted that the program has become so successful, that the federal government is considering using it as a model for similar programs.

Partnership for Veterans Mental Health Services. Commissioner Burgess reported that DVS has developed a partnership with the Virginia Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services and the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical centers in the Veterans Integrated Services Network Regions 5 and 6 (VISN-5, VISN-6) to provide mental health services to Virginia veterans through the state Community Services Boards (CSBs) network of care providers. Commissioner Burgess noted that VISN-5 includes VA medical centers in Martinsburg, West Virginia and Washington, DC and their affiliated community-based outpatient clinics; and VISN-6 includes the three VA medical centers in Virginia and their affiliated community-based outpatient clinics. This initiative would involve a formal partnership between the VISN networks and the CSBs, whereby veterans who are treated at the VA medical centers could be referred to their local CSB for follow-up and mental health rehabilitation. Commissioner Burgess noted that Martha Mead has been hired to implement EO 19 initiatives and will be spending a lot of time on this project.

<u>TurboVet</u>. Commissioner Burgess asked Chairman Galanti to brief the Board on the progress of the TurboVet initiative. Mr. Galanti explained that the TurboVet project involves the development of software modeled after "Turbo Tax" that would assist veterans and claims agents in simplifying veterans claims processing, vastly improving the chances of success. Mr. Galanti reported that the Public Safety, Finance and Technology secretariats were briefed on the now complete pilot phase of the project in a meeting last week. Mr. Galanti added that the pilot has received so much attention nationwide, that it now is being considered as a mechanism at the federal level for the Department of Defense and the VA

to interface to process veterans information. Chairman Galanti thanked Governors Warner and Kaine and their staff for their support of the project and help in getting it off the ground. Mr. Galanti emphasized that when the program is fully operational, not only will it help veterans and their families, but it will provide a stream of revenue into the Commonwealth. Delegate Cole added that the company that manufactures and markets Turbo Tax is based in Stafford, Virginia and might possibly be available to provide technical expertise for the TurboVet program, if necessary. Chairman Galanti noted that the company that developed the software, Stratizon Corporation, has obtained a trademark for the TurboVet trade name.

Chairman Galanti emphasized that TurboVet will allow veterans data to be stored on a secure central server of the Commonwealth, eliminating the threat of security breach of the information. Delegate Watts asked for a written summary of the project, and Commissioner Burgess promised to send a summary of the project to Board members.

Bill Leighty added that there is no equity among veterans claims for the same disabilities, i.e., one veteran could receive a higher disability rating than another, because of the lack of uniformity in the way claims currently are processed. Mr. Leighty noted that unless the person processing the claim is skilled on how to answer questions posed by the VA to evaluate the claim, it can result is denial or lower disability ratings. Mr. Leighty explained that, currently, veterans can process their claims themselves, through a claims agent of a Veterans Service Organization, or through a state veterans agency like DVS but that, despite the level of skill provided by trained claims agents, only about 5% of all claims submitted to the VA are ready to rate.

Mr. Leighty noted that the average length of time it takes to receive a VA claims decision is 362 days, and sometimes years, with some claimants passing away before they receive their decision. Mr. Leighty added that the goal of TurboVet is to take the uncertainty and "luck" out of the claims process and expedite the decision by automating the system and organizing the information into a better format. Mr. Leighty explained that the TurboVet system will not allow the claim to be submitted until all information requested is complete. Mr. Leighty also noted that once the system is fully operational, the chance of submitting a complete claim that is ready for rating could raise from about 5% to nearly 100%, and cut an estimated 100 days off the length of time it takes to get a decision.

Mr. Leighty said that the proof of the system concept has been completed, a prototype is operational and there is intellectual and technological capital invested in it, with the only item remaining being financial capital. Mr. Leighty said it is estimated that \$5 million will be needed to bring the project to fruition but that because of state budget shortfalls, the Commonwealth probably will not be able to fund it and, therefore, he, Commissioner Burgess, Chairman Galanti and Ned Hunter of Stratizon Corporation are engaged in venture capital fundraising to front the project. Mr. Leighty advised that the response to the fundraising efforts has been very positive, and the decision now is which entities will be selected to fund the project. Mr. Leighty emphasized that getting the project funded and implemented through private resources will speed up its deployment. Mr. Leighty added that the project will pay for itself in three years.

Commissioner Burgess said that six of his peer directors across the country have expressed an interest in getting similar projects started in their states. Commissioner Burgess noted that he and his staff would be giving a presentation on the project at the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs training conference in Annapolis the week of September 17. Commissioner Burgess said that DVS and the Governor's Office allocated \$50,000 each for the pilot phase of the project.

In addition to EO 19 initiatives, Commissioner Burgess reported that the long-term care feasibility study being conducted for DVS by the Schroeder Center for Healthcare Policy at the College of William and Mary is nearly complete. Commissioner Burgess explained that the study focuses on the Northern Virginia region as a possible location for a third care center. Commissioner Burgess said that the final version of the report should be available for distribution to the Board by the end of September.

Commissioner Burgess also reported that a feasibility study on the need for additional cemeteries also is in progress and is being conducted by the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service at the University of Virginia. The results of the study will help DVS determine where to place future veterans cemeteries in Virginia.

Commissioner Burgess then reported on the current state budget shortfalls, explaining that the Governor's Office has instructed that state agencies submit proposals for 5% General Fund reductions to their budgets through their appropriate Secretariat. Commissioner Burgess noted that DVS has an overall operating budget of \$34,000,000, of which \$5.7 million is General Funds, so the reduction for DVS is about \$288,000. Commissioner Burgess assured Board members that current DVS services and programs will be preserved at their current funding levels in its budget reduction proposal.

## **Pre-Registered Public Comment**

There was no pre-registered public comment, but Chairman Galanti took a moment to recognize the hard work and dedication of Roger Sullivan in support of Virginia veterans. Mr. Galanti noted that Mr. Sullivan has worked tirelessly to ensure that veterans receive the services and benefits they have earned through their service and sacrifice. Delegate Watts echoed Chairman Galanti's comments and praised Mr. Sullivan's advocacy on behalf of Virginia veterans. Delegate Watts also praised Bill Leighty for his hard work for veterans while serving in the Governor's office.

## Briefing on Secretary of Public Safety's Board Protocol Meeting

Thad Jones reported on the Secretary of Public Safety's Board Protocol meeting held on August 21, at which he represented the Board of Veterans Services. Mr. Jones explained that the purpose of the meeting was to make boards of each agency within the Public Safety secretariat aware of board expectations and procedures, and to encourage a team concept to better serve agency constituents.

Delegate Watts said her understanding is that, when legislators communicate with board members on legislative and state budget items, those communications are to be reported to the Secretary's Office. Mr. Jones confirmed that to be correct, based on the information he received at the board protocol meeting.

Pat Green then raised the question about public meeting requirements and their impact on Board subcommittee operations. Mr. Green suggested that subcommittees meet simultaneously, just prior to each full board meeting. Mr. Ferguson advised that the Virginia Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) does not permit this format, because members of the public would not be able to hear the deliberations of all subcommittees. Commissioner Burgess said DVS would work to develop a mechanism that would allow for subcommittee meetings and still satisfy FOIA requirements.

# **Legislative Report**

Delegate Watts commented on the state budget shortfall, noting such things as the downtown in the housing market. Delegate Cole added that even in years in which there were budget surpluses, excess spending occurred and that typically, government tends to spend every dollar it receives, despite prevailing economic conditions.

# JLC Chairman's Report

Sam Wilder began his report by explaining that there are now 23 VSOs represented on the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations (JLC), comprised of a collective membership of approximately 250,000 veterans, statewide. Mr. Wilder emphasized that the JLC has worked hard since its inception to ensure that Virginia veterans speak with one voice when seeking support from law and policy makers for the programs and services they and their families need. Mr. Wilder called attention to the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations' 2008 Legislative Objectives handout. Mr. Wilder said that the items on the list are prioritized; provide rationale in accompanying "position papers;" represent the consensus of each VSO represented on the JLC; and will be presented to the 2008 General Assembly for consideration and legislative action. Mr. Wilder called special attention to Item 3, Wounded Warrior Mental Health Care, emphasizing the importance of state and local government to augment VA services for veterans suffering from mental health problems such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

## **Subcommittee Reports**

#### Benefits Subcommittee

There was no Benefits Subcommittee report.

## Care Centers Subcommittee

Subcommittee Chairman Thad Jones called attention to his written report distributed at the meeting. Mr. Jones said that the Veterans Care Center Advisory Committee had met in July and that information on the long-term care center feasibility study was presented. Mr. Jones said that the study report may be found on the DVS web site at <a href="https://www.dvs.virginia.gov">www.dvs.virginia.gov</a>.

Mr. Jones also reported that at the July 16 Board retreat, several goals were identified that DVS hopes to accomplish by the year 2012.

Mr. Jones said that key staff for the Sitter & Barfoot Veterans Care Center have been hired, including the positions of Administrator, Director of Nursing, Admissions Director, Pharmacy Director, Housekeeping Director, Maintenance Director, Human Resource Director and Finance Director. Mr. Jones said that guests attending the September 26 dedication ceremony will have the opportunity to meet these and other SBVCC staff. Mr. Jones said that plans for the dedication are going well and he thanked everyone who has been involved in the planning for making this event a success. Mr. Jones urged Board members to make monetary donations to offset the costs associated with the dedication ceremony.

Mr. Jones reported that Governor Kaine and members of his cabinet visited the Virginia Veterans Care Center (VVCC) in August. Governor Kaine indicated that he was very pleased with the facility and the level of care provided to veterans there, as did Secretary of Health and Human Resources Marilyn Tavenner. Mr. Jones also reported that the annual VA survey and state licensure and certification survey soon will be conducted at the VVCC.

Mr. Jones said there was nothing new to report on the DVS applications to the VA to add additional care centers, with Virginia still ranked 88 and 89 on the VA's prioritized list.

# Cemeteries Subcommittee

Subcommittee Chairman Pat Green thanked DVS staff for their hard work in ensuring that the Southwest Virginia Cemetery project stays on track. Mr. Green said that the land for the Southwest Virginia cemetery will not transfer until some time in March 2008, due to some details that needed to be worked out, including an environmental impact study and a topographical survey, which have now been completed and submitted to the Department of Army. Mr. Green said that the next step is to move the Radford Army Ammunitions Plan security fence from its current location to accommodate the new boundaries created by the cemetery and create a dedicated entrance for the cemetery. Mr. Green noted that a Request for Proposal for the fence work probably will be issued some time in November and that, hopefully, the relocation will occur around the first of the year.

Mr. Green also reported that the grant pre-application in the amount of \$11 million for the construction of the cemetery was submitted to the State Cemeteries Grant Program, National Cemeteries Administration last month. Mr. Green noted that there will be a deed transfer ceremony in Dublin in March, or earlier.

Mr. Green also reported that further meetings have taken place with regard to improving the location and size of the signage at both veterans cemeteries, and that progress is being made. Mr. Green explained that plans already are being made to construct signage for the Southwest Virginia cemetery.

Mr. Green said that he now serves on the Virginia Cemetery Association's board as a non-voting member, and that that board supports the construction of veterans cemeteries in Virginia.

Mr. Green praised DVS for promoting the need for more veterans cemeteries with the various news media across the state.

#### Budget and Strategic Planning Ad Hoc Subcommittee

Subcommittee member Bettye Simmons asked Steve Combs to present the Subcommittee's report. Mr. Combs began by calling attention to the *DVS Opportunities for Achievement During the Next Five Year Initial Action Plan* handout. Mr. Combs explained that the Plan represents draft framework, with timelines, that came out of the ideas offered at the July Board retreat. Mr. Combs reviewed each item listed and further explained that if adopted by the Board, the Plan calls for the items to be assigned to the Board's subcommittees for analysis and recommendation. Once the subcommittees have completed their work, their recommendations then would be submitted to DVS for further action. Mr. Combs noted that some items could be accomplished by legislation, some by Executive Order, some by budget amendment, etc. Ms. Simmons suggested adding the following item to the Plan:

12. DVS tracks/follows-up on progress of each item and provides periodic feedback to the Board.

A motion was made by Pat Green, seconded by Thad Jones and passed unanimously to adopt the Plan.

# **Open Public Comment and Roundtable Discussion**

There was no public comment, but the Board welcomed Sam Wilder's guest, Mr. Tony Haddock, an out-of-town visitor.

# Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 1:45 p.m. Some of the members attended a guided tour of the Museum of the Marine Corps following the meeting.